

# NETWORK NEWS

INFORMATION FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

## Centers Benefit Multifamily Property Owners and Managers

### DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS TO AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES



**A**lthough their economic and financial situations may be different, owners and organizations that manage large multifamily properties, and smaller independent owners and managers both report similar significant benefits from making a Neighborhood Networks community learning center a part of their properties. The most clear-cut and immediate benefit of having the centers is the reduction in the vacancy rate.

Fran Howell, project administrator for three HUD insured and assisted housing properties owned by Church Housing Association in Prestonsburg, Kentucky, says the vacancy rate is down significantly for her family properties. All three have onsite centers.

The properties include one senior housing facility, Highland Terrace, and two family residence developments, Highland Heights and Cliffside Apartments. Cliffside Apartments has 94 Section 8 housing units. Highland Heights offers 6 market-rate units and 66 Section 8 housing units.

Tenants "just don't want to leave," says Howell, because of the services offered by the Neighborhood Networks centers. "I was talking to [a staff member] in the Section 8 program, and she said, 'I

don't know what's happening with the voucher program. People are dropping off.... I talked to my manager about it. I think it has to do with the centers.'" Residents whose incomes increase may choose not to leave the property even though they are no longer eligible for voucher support, Howell explains.

Which programs attract and hold residents? Children's activities are most popular, Howell says. "Children are the biggest reason parents stay. Kids love the programs. We've had horse rides, free movie passes, mini-fire truck rides, a visit by a big fire truck, free school supplies.... Parents love that. We give them everything they need to start school,

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U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of Multifamily Housing Programs  
[www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org)

## Multifamily Property Owners and Managers (continued from page 1)

including grade-level-appropriate books. There are incentive programs for getting good grades or finishing all homework and prizes for reading—movie passes and pizza parties. Children who don't have homework read to the younger ones."

Center activities provide appealing and positive alternatives in an area with limited outside recreational space and limited organized recreation options, Howell says. The centers raised money to send kids to summer camp and used donations to buy educational software. "We spent about \$300," Howell says. "The children love it and they are learning." Cliffside Apartments also has a community garden, run in cooperation with the city. Children and parents grow produce to eat and sell; the gardening families share the profits from the sales.

The Highland Heights center was converted from a two-bedroom unit at a cost of about \$5,000. Inhouse maintenance staff remodeled the apartment to accommodate the center. HUD donated

two computers and the center purchased a new computer out of Residual Receipts.

At Cliffside Apartments, the company used accumulated Residual Receipts funds to build a community center building for approximately \$120,000 with enough funds remaining to purchase five new computers, in addition to the three HUD donated.

The Church Housing Association centers raise operating funds from profits—about \$500 per year—from vending machines on the properties, fundraiser dinners, and proceeds from working with a visiting family portrait photographer (who provides low-cost portraits to residents and who also donates funds to the centers). The city of Prestonsburg provides approximately \$1,000 in funding annually for the Cliffside center. Apart from the center coordinators' salaries, the centers are almost self-sufficient, Howell says. The salaries are paid out of the properties' 6310 operating funds.

CommonBond Communities owns or manages 42 properties in and around



*The Church Housing Association in Prestonsburg, Kentucky, finds that children's activities help attract and hold residents.*

## NETWORKNEWS

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St. Paul, Minnesota. Every CommonBond property has what the company calls an Advantage Center that offers job-readiness and employment training, placement, and retention services; educational assistance; computer access and training; English as a second language and citizenship courses; courses in household financial management; healthcare; and other resident services. Approximately 20 of the Advantage Centers have been certified as official Neighborhood Networks centers, says Scott Beckman, CommonBond vice president for services.

The main reason CommonBond establishes the centers, Beckman notes, is that “we are a nonprofit organization with a mission to support the success of our residents.”

With that said, CommonBond sees “a number of benefits to our properties that are also significant.”

Unit turnovers are definitely lower with a center onsite, Beckman says, and that reduces turnover costs and vacancy rates.

CommonBond also has seen “dramatic reductions in criminal activity and vandalism. Our investment [in centers] is comparable to what we see others invest in security—it’s definitely worth the investment.”

Operating Neighborhood Networks centers is a strategic benefit in the company’s relationship with HUD, Beckman says. “We are in partnership with HUD in providing supported affordable housing,” he notes. “To the extent that we can help our residents earn more, that reduces the cost to HUD” of supporting tenant housing costs.

“That’s a good win-win situation,” Beckman adds. “If we are saving them money, then they are more likely to continue to be engaged with us in the future. Overall, I would say that the value of operating the centers clearly equals or exceeds the costs for us.”



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—Scott Beckman,  
CommonBond  
vice president for services

## New Look and Name for News Brief

As part of HUD’s continuing effort to ensure that Neighborhood Networks is driven by the needs of the communities it serves, Neighborhood Networks proudly introduces the new *NetworkNews*, which replaces the *News Brief* newsletter. *NetworkNews* will provide information for Neighborhood Networks owners, managers, and partners. It will focus on management-related issues that affect Neighborhood Networks centers including partnership development, sustainability, and consortia and community building. This quarterly newsletter will increase awareness

of the Neighborhood Networks program among all stakeholders. Issues will include articles on fundraising and computer access issues, and information on new partners and centers.

We welcome your comments on our new look. Send your comments or ideas to Matt Pierre, Neighborhood Networks Newsletter coordinator, mpierre@aspensys.com. We hope *NetworkNews* will better assist you in providing important computer access and self-sufficiency services to underserved communities.

**We needed to work together to bridge the digital divide. We had children and families with no computer access at home and limited computer access at school or at the public library.**

—Nyvia Colón,  
Technology Goes Home program  
coordinator and instructor



## Technology Goes Home Provides Computer Literacy Training in Boston

**T**echnology Goes Home (TGH), which serves Boston's Lower Roxbury neighborhood residents, is a computer literacy program with a difference. Families that successfully complete computer skills training receive a new 500 MHz computer, a color printer, and a year's free Internet access. The benefits of this program go well beyond receiving the computer. Many parents who have completed the training have improved their job skills, children's grades have risen, and the community has benefited from the volunteer hours donated by program participants.

TGH, which operates in the Madison Park Village Computer Learning Center, was implemented by the Lower Roxbury Technology Collaborative, a group of seven community-based organizations: Boston Public Library/Dudley Station, Cooper Community Center, Lower Roxbury Residents Association, Mandela Computer Center, Madison Park Development Corporation (MPDC), St. Francis de Sales/St. Phillips Parish, and Whittier Street Health Center. MPDC received an initial 2-year grant from the Digital Bridge Foundation in the Boston mayor's office to fund the program. The grant was recently renewed for 2003.

Nyvia Colón, a former Roxbury resident and program coordinator and instructor for TGH, modified the program to meet the needs of Lower Roxbury residents. "We needed to work together to bridge the digital divide," she explains. "We had children and families with no computer

access at home and limited computer access at school or at the public library."

### Connecting Parents and Children

This intergenerational program is open to Boston area families. Children must be between the ages of 9 and 18 and attending school. Each family—parent and child—is required to submit an application and an essay that outlines why they want to participate. Colón interviews each family to be sure they understand the criteria for participation and the program rules, then she screens each parent and child for computer skills. Families sign a contract to provide 40 hours of volunteer time to members of the Lower Roxbury Technology Collaborative while they participate in the 10-week program.

Participants meet for 4 hours each week. Families are required to attend all 10 classes and are automatically dropped from the program if they do not. Classes in English are held on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., with 2 hours of lecture and 2 hours of lab. Bilingual Spanish/English classes are offered on Monday and Wednesday evenings for 2 hours each. Each session has 11 families enrolled with the expectation that 10 of them will successfully complete training.

During the class, participants learn the basics of computer software and about the Windows operating system. "Kids know how to use computers," says Colón, "but they often don't know the terminology. So we focus on that. The more they use the computers, the more familiar they become with the terminology."

## Developing a Résumé

Workshop participants take basic and intermediate Microsoft Word classes, with a research paper due at the end of the 10-week session. Participants use the Internet search skills they learned in class to write about the education, skills, or training required for a chosen career. Parents and children interview each other about their career hopes. Part of the research paper includes development of résumés. A parent's résumé can be used to obtain higher-paying jobs. The child's résumé is used to keep track of skills and accomplishments in preparation for college applications. Once developed, it can be updated annually.

Forty-five families have successfully completed the TGH program and received new computers. Colón has helped to place 17 adults in better-paying jobs and watched many of the TGH children improve their grades. Classes continue

to fill rapidly as word spreads throughout the neighborhood.

Colón says that one of the biggest keys to TGH's success has been "making sure that people are ready. You may be ready to train them, but they have to be ready to be trained—that is really important."

Asked what advice she would give to groups hoping to establish a computer center, Colón replies, "Don't try to do too much." She suggests applying for a social services grant to hire a person to run the computer center. "Ideally you want to have someone separate from property management running your training program, someone who can devote his or her time completely to training and interacting with residents." ■



## Neighborhood Networks: 1,000 Centers Nationwide and Counting

Neighborhood Networks reached a significant landmark in spring 2002 by expanding to more than 1,000 community learning centers in HUD insured and assisted properties in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Neighborhood Networks began in 1995 as one of the first federal programs to promote self-sufficiency to residents living in multifamily housing. Since its inception, the program has expanded rapidly; within its first 2 years, more than 200 Neighborhood Networks centers were operational, and between 1997 and

1999, the number of centers increased to more than 500.

With Neighborhood Networks' seventh anniversary approaching in September, the grassroots program is reaching new heights. Today, more than 1,000 Neighborhood Networks centers provide computer and Internet access, literacy programs, and employment opportunities for residents living in multifamily housing.

This year alone, more than 28 Neighborhood Networks centers have celebrated grand openings, including

**The Neighborhood Networks program remains focused, opening new doors to various opportunities for adults, children, and seniors.**

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## Neighborhood Networks Welcomes New Partners

**N**eighborhood Networks is happy to welcome these new partners who will be providing centers across the nation with many opportunities.

### America's Promise

America's Promise has 15 Communities of Promise nationwide that provide technical assistance and resources. Neighborhood Networks centers located in these communities will become partners, which will increase their service linkage to the larger community.

### NASA

HUD will continue its partnership with NASA, developing more Webcasts. The most recent Webcast, "Women Working on Mars!" received nearly twice as many hits as the Webcast held in November.

### About Face

Neighborhood Networks centers located in areas where About Face operates received information about how youth can participate in a summer program. HUD hopes to expand this partnership to include other activities. The

About Face program is sponsored by the Florida State Army National Guard.

### Senior Navigator

Neighborhood Networks is arranging for Senior Navigator staff to present information on resources available on their Web site to two Virginia centers. HUD hopes to expand this partnership to centers in other areas.


### Bank of America and Goodwill Industries

Earlier this spring, approximately 50 Neighborhood Networks residents attended a job-training program held by Bank of America and Goodwill in Atlanta, Georgia. Neighborhood Networks is working with Bank of America to repeat the success of this program nationwide.

### NeighborWorks

Neighborhood Networks is developing a partnership with the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, which is compiling information on the benefits of community learning centers to multi-family housing.

### Magic Johnson Foundation

The Magic Johnson Foundation will provide Magic Johnson Inventor Center designations to five Neighborhood Networks centers, which will be outfitted with computers provided by Hewlett-Packard. The foundation will launch these partnerships in September. 




*Residents from the Operation P.E.A.C.E. Neighborhood Networks Center in Atlanta, Georgia, are participating in an ongoing prehire training program for jobs at Bank of America.*

## Neighborhood Networks *(continued from page 5)*

the Elijah Project in Detroit; Gateway@ Buckman Road in Alexandria, Virginia; and Hickory Grove in Indianapolis. Hundreds of additional new centers are currently in various stages of planning.

Despite this rapid growth, the Neighborhood Networks program remains focused, opening new doors to various opportunities for adults, children, and seniors. The hard work of center directors, staff, partners, and supporters allows thousands of residents to increase their incomes, develop the skills needed to find and

keep jobs, create microenterprises, open small businesses, and expand home-ownership opportunities.

You can make a difference in your community. For more information about Neighborhood Networks, call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll free at (888) 312-2743 or visit the Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org). 



## Thinking About Starting a Neighborhood Networks Center?

The process of starting a Neighborhood Networks center can be simplified by knowing where to gather the right resources. The best place to begin is the **Start a New Center** section of the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org). This section will provide you with the basic information to get your center started. Your local Neighborhood Networks coordinator is also an essential source of information for starting a new center.

The following online resources, fact sheets, and technical assistance guides can be downloaded free from the Neighborhood Networks Web site:

- ***Easy Step-by-Step Advice to Start a Neighborhood Networks Center***
- ***Neighborhood Networks Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START)***
- ***Neighborhood Networks Resource Guide***
- ***How to Plan for Sustainability***
- ***Lessons Learned in Starting and Running a Neighborhood Networks Center***

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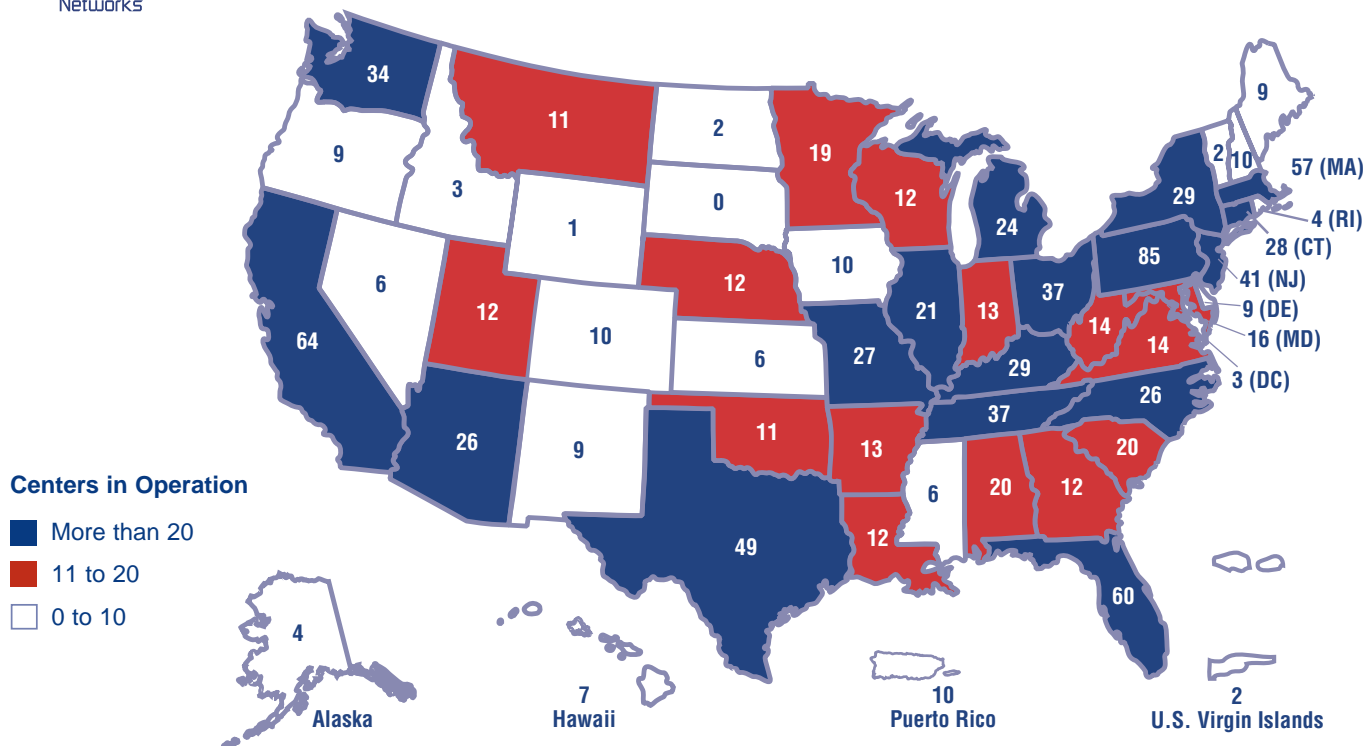
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## Neighborhood Networks Centers in Operation

*As of July 1, 2002, 1,007 centers are in operation in  
FHA insured and assisted multifamily housing*



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development